



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Veterans Benefits Administration**  
**Western Area Office**  
**3333 N. Central Ave Suite 3026**  
**Phoenix, AZ. 85012**

April 25, 2013

The Honorable Dean Heller  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Heller:

Thank you for your letter regarding Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims processing for Veterans in Nevada and nationwide. I share your concern with the current shortfall in delivering timely benefits decisions. Veterans, their family members, and survivors have earned and deserve our very best performance, and we are committed to delivering benefits and services faster, more accurately, and with greater efficiency.

The Department of Veterans Affairs values your interest in ensuring adequate resources are provided. The Department of Veterans Affairs has seen a 36 percent increase in staffing over the past four years and we would appreciate your continued support in our Secretary's budget request. Staffing at the Reno VARO and nationwide is based on a resource allocation model methodology that weighs inventory of current pending disability claims, receipts of new claims, current backlog as well as the unique missions of each station.

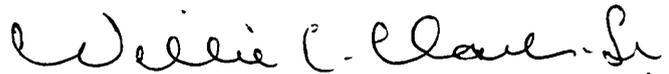
I am confident in the ability of our dedicated workforce, many of whom are Veterans, to transform the benefits delivery system. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) completed over 1 million claims per year in fiscal years (FY) 2010, 2011, and 2012. Yet the workload has grown relentlessly, and many Veterans have become impatient. Over these same 3 years, VA has identified, developed, and is now implementing many of the critical fundamental changes necessary to meet our goal to process all disability claims within 125 days of receipt with 98-percent accuracy in 2015. The Reno VARO recently transitioned into the new claims processing model which organizes disability claims into three distinct processing lanes. In April 2013, Veterans Benefits Management Systems (VBMS), a web-based, electronic claims processing solution complemented by improved business processes was rolled-out to the Reno VARO. VBMS will assist in eliminating the claims backlog and serve as the enabling technology for quicker, more accurate, and integrated claims processing in the future.

We can all agree there are too many Veterans who have waited far too long for a decision. To address this backlog, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is

aggressively implementing a special initiative to quickly decide the oldest claims in the inventory. This initiative will accelerate the elimination of the backlog for these Veterans and is part of VA's overall strategy to eliminate the claims backlog in 2015. VBA has directed all regional offices to provide provisional decisions to Veterans who have been waiting the longest. These provisional decisions will be based on the evidence already available to VA and the Veteran will be given additional time to submit evidence or request further assistance from VA. The claims that are considered "ready-to-rate" will be given final decisions. In all cases, VA will continue to make sure that applicable service personnel and treatment records are available and that VA examination results are obtained if required. VA will continue to prioritize Veterans who are homeless, terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, and Medal of Honor recipients, those facing financial hardship and our most seriously injured in addition to Fully Developed Claims.

While many challenges remain to eliminate the backlog, I am confident that the Reno VARO leadership will remain on a positive course. All employees at the Reno VARO are dedicated to serving our Nation's Veterans and to ensure Veterans' claims are processed timely. We welcome the opportunity to affirm our commitment to the Public's trust.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Willie C. Clark, Sr." in a cursive style.

Willie C. Clark, Sr.

Director, Western Area Office